

October 16, 1963

Committee on Appointments & Promotions

From: Halsey Royden

Minsky Appointment

C  
The documentation on Minsky seems to me to be very thorough. The letters by McCarthy and Forsythe are detailed and, I believe, fairly accurate summaries. You will note supporting Stanford letters from Lederberg and Suppes, a dissenting letter from Gilbarg, and outside letters from Miller, Perlis, Simon, and Wang. I have a few additional comments for the Committee.

O  
P  
After consultation with the Graduate Dean and some of the users of the Computer Center, our office has adopted the policy that the Computer Science Division should have two additional (half-time) men in the near future, one in numerical and one in non-numerical aspects of computing. It is planned to handle the numerical role at the assistant professor level for the time being. I believe that the non-numerical appointment should be strongly machine oriented. Of the possible candidates for this position I would rate only Perlis above Minsky, and we have already spent two years in an unsuccessful attempt to induce him to Stanford.

Y  
Both the Provost and I have made inquiries in the East, and are satisfied that the case presented for Minsky is fairly accurate. Most impressive was my conversation with Wang at Harvard. Evidence for Wang's enthusiasm is the fact that his division (Applied Science) at Harvard has voted that Minsky be offered a Professorship. At the Columbia Computer Center I was told, without my having mentioned Minsky, of excellent progress on time sharing programs being done at MIT under Minsky and at Stanford under McCarthy. Suppes is already planning a considerable research program which will use these routines, and I am confident that they will be valuable for other research in the social sciences and perhaps also for "on-line" computing in the natural sciences.

It seems to me that Gilbarg's dissent is based largely on the application of "centralist" standards. Such standards are widely held by mathematicians, but I am not convinced that such standards should be used. Moreover, it is my personal opinion that Minsky's paper on the unsolvability of Post's tag problem is a first-class piece of work by any standards.

I think that the addition of Minsky to McCarthy will give us considerable distinction in the non-numerical field and will considerably enhance the usefulness of Computer Science to other areas of the University.